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## ABSTRACT

This study reports the results of 3 years of implementation of a Partnership Academy, a restructuring model for at-risk high school students at J. Sterling Morton East High School in Cicero, Illinois. Based on the California model, the partnership academy is distinguished by four features: a multi-year, school-within-a-school structure from 10th grade to graduation, integration of academic and vocational curriculum around a health and business career theme, block scheduling, and active employer involvement through job shadowing and mentoring. Program evaluation focused on measuring students' performance as indicated by attendance, credits earned, grade point averages, and achievement-test results. A follow-up survey documented students' postsecondary activities in college and the workplace. Results showed favorable program effects for all indicators. Students had higher attendance rates, increased credits earned, improved grades, and significant achievement test gains. Students graduated on time from high school, with a high percentage continuing their education in college. Some students secured meaningful employment related to the Academy career themes. Morton East High School Partnership Academy is an effective, alternative approach to meeting the needs of our multicultural and diversified society. (Contains 9 tables and 9 references.) (Author/MLH)

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## Effects of A Partnership Academy on School and Career Success Of At-Risk High School Students

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Paper presented at the AERA Annual Meeting in San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998

## ABSTRACT

### Effects of A Partnership Academy on School and Career Success Of At-Risk High School Students

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This study reports the results of three years of implementation of a Partnership Academy, a restructuring model for high school at-risk students at J. Sterling Morton East High School, Cicero, Illinois. Based on the California model, the Partnership Academy is distinguished by four features: a multi-year, school-within-a-school structure beginning in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and continuing through graduation; the integration of academic and vocational curriculum around a health and business career theme; block scheduling; and active employer involvement through job shadowing and mentoring.

The evaluation of the program was focused on measuring students' performance as indicated by attendance, credits earned, grade point averages and achievement test results. Students and parents also responded to a survey eliciting their perceived success and involvement in the program. A follow-up survey documented students' post-secondary activities in college and the workplace.

The results showed the favorable impact of the program on all these indicators. Students had higher attendance rates, increased credits earned, improved grade point averages, and significant gains in achievement tests. Furthermore, students graduated on time from high school with a high percentage continuing their education in college. Some students also secured meaningful employment related to the Academy career themes.

Morton East High School Partnership Academy discovered a way to help at-risk high school students be successful in school and post-secondary learning and work settings. The Academy model offers an alternative approach to meet the needs of our multicultural and diversified society. Partnerships between schools, communities and employers are necessary to help students become successful learners who are useful and responsible citizens.

# Effects of A Partnership Academy on School and Career Success Of At-Risk High School Students

## Purpose

This presentation reports and shares the experience of an alternative instructional program called a Partnership Academy, a restructuring model that combines core academic curriculum with technical instruction in a particular occupational field (Stern, Dayton, Paik, Weisberg, & Evans, 1988). Designed for at-risk high school students, the Academy model has as its purpose to prepare students for high school graduation, college entrance, and employment training. The report will focus on the effects of the program on students' school performance, and post-secondary career and learning opportunities.

## Background and Theoretic Perspectives

J. Sterling Morton East High School is located in Cicero, Illinois, a suburb just adjacent to the city of Chicago. The Town of Cicero has a population of over 65,000 people representing a growing Hispanic ethnic group, as well as many senior citizens from Eastern European heritage. Morton East High School serves the community with a student enrollment of approximately 3,500 in grades 9-12. Currently the school has 82% Hispanic students and 60.2% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Like other schools with a high number of students from disadvantaged families, Morton East High School is experiencing problems categorized by "at risk" factors. These factors include an increase in low student academic achievement, increased numbers of limited English proficient students, excessive truancy and dropping out, and little access to parental

guidance and resources for improvement. The cycle of teenage pregnancy and parenthood continues to spread from generation to generation, and students leave school with little guidance or direction for future advancement. It is also apparent that students have little opportunity to bond with adult teachers as they move through six periods a day in a traditional program that has little opportunity to individually address these growing students issues.

Proponents of education reform recommend that high schools reexamine their ways to prepare students for their future in higher education and the world of work. With this examination, research indicates that high schools can no longer be depersonalized institutions that rely on long standing traditions of departmentalized instruction delivered in tidy 50-minute segments (NASSP,1996). Schools need to restructure to meet the challenges of the new century, and the ever increasing needs of our teenagers who will be thrust into a rapidly changing society. New initiatives may be viewed as risk-taking yet are necessary in order to accomplish changes that continuously improve our educational system.

Research shows that high school career academies across the country hold substantial promise for alleviating many of the problems disadvantaged youth often face in school and in the labor market (Reller, 1984; Stern, Dayton, Paik, Weisberg, & Evans, 1988; Stern, Raby & Dayton, 1992). Begun in the 1980's in the state of California, career academies offer a new structure for high schools that require academic rigor organized around a career-related theme. The model suggests that large high schools must break up into smaller units so that teachers and students can get to know one another better in a setting that supports integrated, applied learning. The content of the

curriculum is designed to be practical and connected to real-life applications so that students can link their education to the future (NASSP, 1996). Furthermore, partnerships between students, teachers, parents, business partners, and employers are critical in order to develop the academy model with input from all constituents (Stern, Raby, & Dayton, 1992).

### Design of the Program

Funded by the Illinois State Board of Education as part of a state restructuring initiative, Morton East High School designed its Partnership Academy program based on the California career academy model (Stern, Raby & Dayton, 1992) in the fall of 1994. In general, the Academy is distinguished by four key features: a multi-year, school-within-school structure beginning in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and continuing through graduation; the integration of academic and vocational curriculum designed around an occupation theme; block scheduling; and active employer involvement through job shadowing and mentoring for participating students. Approximately 50 students were enrolled into the program each year and committed to staying in the Academy for three years. Building capacity over three years, a total of 150 students in grades 10-12 were enrolled by the end of 1996-97 school year. Students were selected based upon four criteria: below grade level in reading and math performance, excessive absences, low-income status, and/or teenage mother or fatherhood. Students who met the criteria were referred by their freshmen classroom teachers and were interviewed prior to their acceptance into the program. Parents were also included through an information night to indicate the need for their involvement and support.

The participating students were instructed using an integrated curriculum approach, which focused on the career themes of health and business. An overarching focus on developing technology skills was also part of the three-year curriculum. Four academic areas: English, math, science, and business were offered in the Academy with students leaving the Academy for other courses necessary for graduation. Students were exposed to a college preparatory curriculum that was combined with effective learning and problem solving strategies in technical and business fields of study (Bottoms, Presson, Johnson, 1992). Related employability skills, such as dependability and teamwork, were also integrated into course content (SCANS, 1991).

The Academy teachers used an applied, hands-on approach to engage students who typically had little interest or success in learning. In order to address state content and performance standards, teachers had to be sure required material was covered yet they were encouraged to use creative methodology that was more enticing to the students. Thematic units were developed integrating all four content areas in order to point out to students the interdependence of knowledge and skills in the learning process. Additionally, students chose occupational themes that were of interest to them in order to obtain employability skills, through job shadowing at local businesses and industries, needed to enter the job market.

In addition, the program allowed for the same group of teachers (English, math, science and business) to work with the same group of students for all three years, thus the relationship building process naturally provided convenience for closer monitoring of the students' needs. Teachers also developed a sense of "teaming" not only with the students but also with each other, thus fostering a peer-coaching atmosphere. Students were also

allowed to study with the same group of peers for the entire three years, thus they developed lasting friendships. Another component, an adult mentor who was a representative of a particular career field, provided students' with a positive role model and a contact from the "real" world of work.

### Evaluation of the Program

In the summer of 1997, the curriculum director and evaluator of Morton East High School decided to examine the impact of the Partnership Academy on students' school performance. The areas examined were students' attendance rates, credits earned, grade point average (GPA), achievement test results, students' self-reported school performance and parents' opinions about their child's school experience. In March 1998, a follow-up study was conducted with the first class of graduates to see the impact of the program on their post-secondary learning and career opportunities.

Data about students' attendance, credits earned, GPA and achievement test results were gathered from the program files. Students and parents' ratings of students' school performance were obtained by a close-ended survey. The information regarding students' post-secondary activities was collected by a Partnership Academy teacher through a telephone interview with the first class of Partnership Academy graduates.

Partnership Academy students' attendance, credits earned, and GPA were reported in a comparison with all students in the school as well as all Partnership Academy students in the State. Students' achievement test results were compared using a T-test procedure to see the pre and post score difference. The results from closed-ended survey and telephone interview were presented in a descriptive way.



## Findings

According to the data available to the curriculum director and evaluator, it is found that 41 students participated in the program for the 1994-95 school year, 81 students for the 1995-96 school year and 108 students for the 1996-97 school year (See Table 1). Table 1 also shows that compared with all students attending Morton East, Partnership Academy students in each class had a consistently higher attendance percentage for each school year. In addition, Partnership Academy students earned academic credits ranging from 95% to 113% of the requirement. They also achieved grade point averages close to or above C levels ranging from 1.9 to 2.4 (A=4). These are significant results, given the fact that many of the students were targeted because of truancy and low achievement prior to being served in the program. A similar degree of impact of the Partnership Academy on students' performance in attendance, credits earned and GPA was also found in the evaluation of the State Partnership Academies (Illinois State Board of Education, 1997). Table 2 shows, when compared with the State Partnership Academies, Morton East Partnership Academy achieved similar success.

Table 3 reports the significant increase in mean NCE scores on the California Achievement tests for Class of 97, 98 and 99. Only students who had both pre and post testing results are included in the T-test. Table 3 indicates that 34 students in the Class of 97, during the first year of the program, saw a significant increase in math. Likewise for the Class of 98, students had significant gains in math, reading, science and language expression after one year of participation in the program. Class of 99 also achieved

significant increases in reading, science and language expression after being in the program for one whole year.

Table 4 to Table 7 reports senior students' responses to *the Survey of High School Students* in terms of their school performance and post-secondary preparation. A total of 20 senior students in the Class of 97 answered the survey. The following results represent responses from those students.

- In a typical week, 65% to 95% of the students spent time doing assigned or other assigned readings, writing a report, essay, short story, poem or class project, solving math problems, or working on an assignment that covered more than one subject they were taking (See Table 4).
- 74% to 100% of the students agreed that it is very true/ sort of true to say: "I am learning a lot in school." "I pay attention in class." "I try to learn as much as I can about my school subjects." "I read books about things we do in school even when they are not assigned."... (See Table 5).
- 60% to 80% of the students thought that it is not very true/not at all true to say: "Sometimes I don't do as well in school as I could so that I fit in better with my friends." "I often come to class unprepared." "I don't think about school subjects when I'm not in school." "I usually don't know how I'm doing in school compared to my classmates."... (See Table 5).
- 72% of the students took or signed up to take College Board pre-SAT or SAT. 78% of the students visited a college campus. 94% to 100 % of the students talked with counselor about college, looked at college catalogs or talked with parents about how to pay for college (See Table 6).

- More than 85% of the students had taken at least one trip to learn about a business or industry, talked with someone from business or industry, discussed with other students about careers and work, or studied about different kinds of jobs and their requirements in class (See Table 7).

Table 8 reflects parents' opinions about their child's learning experience in the Partnership Academy. The results show:

- 90% to 95% of the parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements: "My son/daughter is more interested in school since attending the career academy." "My son/daughter's school work has improved as a result of participating in the academy." "My son/daughter frequently talks at home about the career academy." "My son/daughter likes being in the career academy program."
- 95% of the parents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "Since being enrolled in the career academy, my son/daughter talks more about plans for the future after graduation from high school."
- 90% of the parents felt they themselves would have benefited from attending an academy when they were in high school.

Table 9 presents the results from a follow-up survey of graduates' post-secondary opportunities. Compared with the graduation rate of Morton East High School for the 1996-97 school year (68.1%), the Partnership Academy had 97% graduation rate for the school year. Among those who graduated, 53% of them attended a 2-year or 4-year college, 29% of them were employed in a semi-skilled or skilled occupation, and 6% of them joined the navy.

## Discussion

Our study included the analysis of students' school performance based on four indicators: a nationally-normed test, students' attendance, credits earned, and grade point averages. The study also analyzed data regarding students' career preparation and success using a survey approach including feedback from both students and parents. The data was gathered over the three years from 1994 to 1997, followed by a post-secondary survey conducted in 1998. Three groups of students: Class of 97, 98, and 99, were studied with their participation varying from one to three years.

The results provide convincing evidence that the first year in the program produced significant academic achievement on the California Achievement Test in multiple content areas. The results could be explained by the fact that the first year in the program students were excited about being accepted into this special group and exhibited increased motivational levels. The results could also be explained by a correlation between the first year of the Academy curriculum with the objectives of the test. Given the short period of treatment, one year, academic achievement gains warranted continuation of the Academy model for this type of student.

The results reported here also show that the students' attendance percentage was higher than the school average. Given the fact that some individual students had poor attendance (more than 10 days of absence per semester) which identified them for the program, the overall program achieved promising gains. Also, the Morton Partnership Academy attendance percentage increase was consistent with the State Partnership Academy attendance results. On standardized graduation requirements, Academy students performed well on earning credits. The results also account for a higher

graduation rate for Academy students compared to the rest of the school. Students reached an average grade level as indicated by their cumulative grade point average. Considering the fact that students had many failing grades prior to their enrollment in the academy, they were able to reach or maintain an average level of performance.

The survey results provided informal feedback regarding students' perception about their performance in the Academy and learning in general. The majority of the students who were in the program for three years had very positive and rewarding learning experiences as indicated by their responses. Their satisfaction might be due to the fact that the Academy model provided a consistent learning environment with the same teachers and peers for three years.

Other Academy components such as exposure to college requirements and early preparation for college planning may account for positive students' feedback regarding post-secondary learning. Furthermore, with over half of the students attending a 2 or 4 year college, the Academy model clearly addressed a long-term goal of continuation of learning beyond high school. Parent feedback also indicates satisfaction in the Academy, and increased communication at home regarding plans for their child's future. Given the fact that many of the parents had limited educational experiences themselves, and little prior involvement in the school, the Academy provided a way for parents to increase their participation in the academic and work preparation of their children.

The Partnership Academy relationship with business and/or industry prepared students with knowledge and skills for their future employability as indicated in their responses to career preparation and post-secondary employment results. The applied curriculum, which was integrated with job skills, combined for an effective approach that

oriented students to demonstrate successful performance not only in the school setting but also on the job.

The successful impact of the Morton East Partnership Academy on students' school performance and post-secondary opportunities was largely due to the essential elements of the model as implemented by dedicated teachers with full support of the school administration. The Morton East Partnership Academy model can be one example of an approach to help at-risk high school students to succeed. In a multicultural and diversified society, the traditional method of instruction and school structure may not fit the needs of current student populations. As educators, we need to adjust our curriculum and instruction in order to prepare students to be useful and responsible citizens. Just as one of the business mentors said: "These students struggle, but with a little help they can be very good citizens and accomplish their goals."

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Table 1  
Attendance, Credits Earned and Cumulative GPA  
Of Morton East Partnership Academy Students and All Other Students by School Year

	Number of Students	Attendance Percent	Percent Credit Earned	Cumulative GPA
<b>1994-95</b>				
PA Class 97, first year	41	95.6%		
Morton East		88.2%		
<b>1995-96</b>				
PA Class 98, first year	41	88.3%	105%	2.0
PA Class 97, second year	40	91.3%	113%	2.4
Morton East		87.0%		
<b>1996-97</b>				
PA Class 99, first year	36	95.2%	100%	1.9
PA Class 98, second year	33	91.3%	95%	1.9
PA Class 97, third year	38	92.6%	108%	2.4
Morton East		88.1%		

Note (1): Number of students at each PA class for each school year may not include the same students.

Note (2): Morton East attendance data is obtained from School Report Card.

Note (3): Data is not available for class of 97 in the first year and all Morton East students regarding credit earned and cumulative GPA.



Table 2  
Attendance, Credits Earned and Cumulative GPA  
Of Morton East and State Partnership Academy Students

	Class 97 94-95	Class 98 95-96	Class 97 95-96	Class 99 96-97	Class 98 96-97	Class 97 96-97
<b><i>Attendance</i></b>						
Morton East PA	95.6%	88.3%	91.3%	95.2%	91.3%	92.6%
State PA	91.1%	91.9%	90.7%	92.0%	92.0%	91.0%
<b><i>Credit Earned</i></b>						
Morton East PA		105.2%	113.0%	100.3%	94.7%	107.8%
State PA		97.7%	100.0%	102.0%	100.0%	103.8%
<b><i>GPA</i></b>						
Morton East PA		2.0	.24	1.9	1.9	2.4
State PA		2.1	2.1	2.4	2.4	2.5

Note (1): State PA data is obtained from Illinois State Board of Education (1997). Illinois Partnership Academies Summative Evaluation 1993-1997.

Note (2): See Table 1 for information regarding the number of students in each class of Morton East Partnership Academy for each school year.

Table 3  
Significant Increase in NCE Mean Scores on California Achievement Test  
By Morton East Partnership Academy Students  
Between the Beginning and the End of Their First Year in the Program

Class	Subject	School Year	N.	Mean Score	S.D.	T-Value	Sig. Level
97	Math	Fall 94	34	39.18	12.51	1.73	.094*
		Spring 95	34	42.65	10.54		
98	Math	Fall 95	31	33.19	14.72	3.07	.004***
		Spring 96	31	38.97	15.34		
	Reading	Fall 95	30	34.70	12.01	2.36	.025**
		Spring 96	30	38.73	15.79		
	Science	Fall 95	31	36.07	18.09	2.77	.009***
		Spring 96	31	46.03	19.11		
	Language Expression	Fall 95	30	36.43	11.79	2.62	.014**
		Spring 96	30	40.97	13.64		
99	Reading	Fall 96	24	25.29	9.98	2.30	.031**
		Spring 97	24	30.50	11.93		
	Science	Fall 96	26	30.69	15.31	3.36	.002***
		Spring 97	26	39.89	11.56		
	Language Expression	Fall 96	25	32.68	10.15	2.38	.025**
		Spring 97	25	35.72	12.14		

\*  $p < .10$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 4  
Results from Partnership Academy Senior (Class 97) Students' Answers to  
*Survey of High School Students*  
Regarding Their Performance in a Typical Week  
(N=20)

During the last week that school was in session, DID YOU spend any time doing the following things – either in class or on your own?

	Yes	No
doing assigned readings in a textbook	70%	30%
doing other assigned reading (such as novels, plays, newspapers, or magazines)	70%	30%
looking up information in the library	65%	35%
writing a report or paper	85%	15%
writing an essay, short story, theme, or poem	95%	5%
solving math problems	85%	15%
writing up a class project or experiment	75%	25%
working on an assignment that covered more than one subject you were taking	70%	30%

Note: The survey was designed by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, New York and conducted by Morton High Schools in the Spring of 97.

Table 5  
Results from Partnership Academy Senior (Class 97) Students' Answers to  
*Survey of High School Students*  
Regarding Their School Performance during Last School Year  
(N=20)

HOW TRUE are the following statements for you this school year?

	Very true	Sort of true	Not very true	Not at all true
I am learning a lot in school	75%	2%	0%	0%
Sometimes I don't do as well in school as I could so that I will fit in better with my friends	15%	5%	30%	50%
I really don't see the point of most of what I'm learning in school	15%	15%	30%	40%
I often come to class unprepared	5%	15%	25%	55%
I don't think about school subjects when I'm not in school	20%	10%	30%	40%
I pay attention in class	75%	20%	5%	0%
I try to learn as much as I can about my school subjects	45%	50%	5%	0%
I read books about things we do in school even when they are not assigned	35%	40%	10%	15%
My classmates and I help each other with our schoolwork	65%	30%	5%	0%
I usually don't know how I'm doing in school compared to my classmates	5%	30%	20%	45%
My classmates and I rely on each other to get through difficult assignments	45%	50%	0%	5%
I'd rather do schoolwork by myself than work on team projects and solving problems together	20%	15%	15%	50%
My classmates and I are good at doing project and solving problems together	50%	35%	5%	10%
If I decide to go to college, I'm getting a good preparation in high school	74%	16%	11%	0%
The things I'm learning in high school make me want to go on and learn more later	42%	37%	11%	11%
I spend time planning for my future	53%	21%	5%	21%

Note: The survey was designed by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, New York and conducted by Morton High Schools in the Spring of 97.

Table 6  
Results from Partnership Academy Senior (Class 97) Students' Answers to  
*Survey of High School Students*  
Regarding Their Preparation for Post-Secondary Learning  
(N=20)

During the current school year, HAVE YOU DONE any of the following to help in thinking about attending a two-year or four-year college?

	Yes	No
talked with a guidance counselor or other adviser about college	94%	6%
looked at college catalogs	94%	6%
visited a college campus	78%	22%
talked with my parents about how to pay for college	100%	0%
taken the College Board pre-SAT or SAT (or signed up to take it this spring)	72%	28%

Note: The survey was designed by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, New York and conducted by Morton High Schools in the Spring of 97.

Table 7  
Results from Partnership Academy Senior (Class 97) Students' Answers to  
Survey of High School Students  
Regarding Their Preparation for Post-Secondary Careers  
(N=20)

During the current school year, HOW OFTEN have you

	Never	Once or twice	3-6 times	About once a month	Several times a month or more
taken a school field trip to learn about a business or industry	10%	35%	45%	10%	0%
heard someone from business or industry give a talk at school	5%	45%	20%	15%	15%
talked about what you'll do after high school with one of your teachers, either one-on-one or in group	5%	10%	40%	20%	25%
talked about what you'll do after high school with another adult at school	15%	15%	20%	25%	25%
had discussion with other students about careers and work	5%	10%	30%	20%	35%
gotten instruction of counseling on how to find a job	11%	21%	16%	21%	32%
studied about different kinds of jobs and their requirements in class	6%	22%	22%	17%	33%
gotten instruction or counseling on how to act on the job	5%	16%	37%	16%	26%
had discussions with adults outside of school about careers and work	5%	32%	16%	21%	26%

Note: The survey was designed by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, New York and conducted by Morton High Schools in the Spring of 97.

Table 8  
Results from Partnership Academy Parents' Survey  
Regarding Their Child's School Experience  
(N=20)

	SD	D	U	A	SA
My son/daughter is more interested in school since attending the career academy	0%	0%	5%	50%	45%
My son/daughter's school work has improved as a result of participating in the academy	0%	5%	0%	45%	50%
My son/daughter frequently talks at home about the career academy	5%	5%	0%	58%	32%
It was a good decision by my son/daughter to enter the academy	0%	0%	5%	16%	79%
My son/daughter like being in the career academy program	0%	0%	5%	21%	74%
Since being enrolled in the career academy, my son/daughter talks more about plans for the future after graduation from high school	5%	0%	0%	42%	53%
I am concerned that career academy courses and academy work experiences are keeping my son/daughter from taking as many traditional high school courses	21%	21%	21%	32%	5%
As I think back upon my experience in the world of work, particularly at the entry level, I think that I would have benefited from being a high school career academy program	0%	5%	5%	47%	42%

SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; U = Unsure; A = Agree; SA = strongly agree.

Note: The survey was designed by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, New York and conducted by Morton High Schools in the Spring of 97.

Table 9  
Results from Follow-up Survey of Class 97 Partnership Academy Students  
Regarding Their Post-Secondary Activities

Gender			Graduation Rate		Post Secondary Activities		
Male	16	46%	Graduated 34 97% Not graduated 1 3% (Morton East: 68.1%)		Attend a college	18	53%
Female	19	54%					
					Employed	10	29%
					In navy	2	6%
					Married having child	3	9%
					Unknown	1	3%

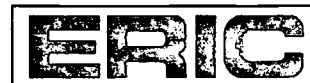
Note: The survey was conducted by a Partnership Academy teacher over the phone during the week of March 2-6, 1998.





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